

Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of

Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Upchurch, Martin ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9143-993X> (2015) [Book Review:] Workers and labour in a globalised capitalism, edited by Maurizio Atzeni. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013, 264 pp., ISBN: 9780230303171, £28.99, paperback. British Journal of Industrial Relations, 53 (4) . pp. 818-819. ISSN 0007-1080 [Article] (doi:10.1111/bjir.12145)

Final accepted version (with author's formatting)

This version is available at: <https://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/17210/>

Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this work are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners unless otherwise stated. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge.

Works, including theses and research projects, may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from them, or their content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). They may not be sold or exploited commercially in any format or medium without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s).

Full bibliographic details must be given when referring to, or quoting from full items including the author's name, the title of the work, publication details where relevant (place, publisher, date), pagination, and for theses or dissertations the awarding institution, the degree type awarded, and the date of the award.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

eprints@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

See also repository copyright: re-use policy: <http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/policies.html#copy>

***Workers and Labour in a Globalised Capitalism*, edited by Maurizio Atzeni. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2013, 264pp., ISBN: 9780230303171, Price 28.99, paperback.**

The new phase of capitalism identified as neoliberalism has changed the environment in which workers organise. Employer drives towards flexibility in all its wage and non-wage forms have created new threats for organised workers in the Global North. In the Global South waged labour has expanded enormously and challenged political regimes in protracted processes of uneven and combined development. In many ways the old country-by-country 'institutional' accounts commonly found within the genre of comparative employment relations have struggled to cope with such profound change.

This book seeks to address these problematics, by bringing together a range of authors with the objective to help us 'reflect upon the centrality of labour within the contemporary process of globalisation'. In doing so, Maurizio Atzeni has brought together a fine collection of essays which are thematically based on subjects such as the changing composition of the working class; informal, formal, free and unfree labour; gender and social reproduction; trade unionism, patterns of strike behaviour and alternative forms of worker resistance. The outcome is a powerful statement of contemporary issues which is accessible in language, inter-disciplinary in approach, and scholarly in content.

The book is first themed by posing the question of class within the new globalised capitalism. David Spencer presents an overview of Marx's key theories of class and class struggle and rehearses concepts emanating from within labour process analysis covering alienation, the Braverman debate, and exploitation. Beverley Silver produces an authoritative chapter on the various 'fixes' (spatial, technological, product and financial) which shape modern processes of capital accumulation. She also writes convincingly on the shifting geographical and temporal terrain of capital-labour struggle firmly locating high points of struggle in periods of systemic crises of profitability and legitimacy. The re-commodification of labour (from the 1980s to the present day) accompanies the breakdown of social compacts which had previously dominated the 'institutionalist' literature throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In this first section of the book Marcel van der Linden also promotes his analysis of changing class composition, arguing through the 'precariat' debate in favour of a new understanding of the relationship between waged and 'unfree' labour. A final chapter by Silvia Federici is a much welcome analysis of social reproduction of labour. She rehearses the key historical debates relating to the role of women and housework in producing value and then discusses the implications of the commercialisation of house and care work linking both to the boom in service work and trends in the birth rate in developed and non-developed countries. Such trends towards commodification clearly have spill-over effects into gender-based concerns of body image, violence against women and pornography.

The middle section presents an analysis of trade unions in the Marxist tradition. Ralph Darlington locates the *Janus* like nature of trade unions under capitalism, with trade union leaders acting as mediators between the rank-and-file and employers, sometimes mobilising against capital but at other times operating within the institutional structures of capitalism to contain struggle and preserve the status quo. This is not to say that there is not a revolutionary potential within trade unions, but rather that this potential is often suppressed by trade union bureaucracies or the sectional divisions between workers themselves. One key point covered by Darlington is the challenge to the social democratic 'identity' of unions caused by neoliberal globalisation and the accommodation by social democratic parties of labour to the same. Indeed, the problems of union

identity are explored further by Sheila Cohen in her chapter on trade union renewal. Cohen presents an overview of trade union militancy in advanced capitalism and calls for renewal via democratic forms of unionism based on rank-and-file activism. The two chapters together return us to the trade union bureaucracy/rank-and-file debates of the 1970s, emphasising the central importance of workers' self activity in labour history as a precursor of building labour as a 'movement'. The themes of workers' self organisation are pursued further by Maurizio Atzeni in a chapter on workers' control and self management. Atzeni emphasises the transformative nature of various types of worker control ranging from the Italian autonomists, through the Institute of Workers Control movement in the UK in the 1970s (when over 200 factory occupations occurred) to the contemporary recovered factories movement in Argentina. The transformative nature of such initiatives works at two levels, both on the consciousness of workers themselves as they take production into their own hands, and as a potential commons activity which breaks the 'circuit of capital' and directly challenges capitalist organisation.

The final section provides a wider perspective of labour as both a subject and object of change. Massimiliano Mollona draws on African examples to further explore the processes by which labour is commodified. He is an economic anthropologist by self-description, which is an interesting change of subject orientation. Of particular interest here is a discussion of Toyotism and Taylorism within both the BRICs and sub-contracting 'colony' countries of the Far East. Gregor Gall then provides an analysis of new forms of contestation from a more traditional industrial relations perspective. In doing so he critically reviews the international evidence not just of strikes, but also of actions short of strike and of factory (and office) occupations. Finally, any book on labour and globalisation would not be complete without a chapter on migrant workers, and this is provided by Immanuel Ness. His focus is on North America, the tensions of the Mexican/USA border, and the response of the US union movement. Issues of global labour solidarity are expressed alongside the narrow sectional concerns of US labour unions, with an appeal to organise migrant workers.

This refreshing book should be very useful for all students interested in global labour issues and the importance of understanding the nature of work and the worker. A minor criticism is that with the exception of one chapter the narratives and analysis are mostly focused on the British and US examples. However, despite this the book's interdisciplinary nature and accessibility will ensure it appeals to a wide audience.

MARTIN UPCHURCH

Middlesex University